

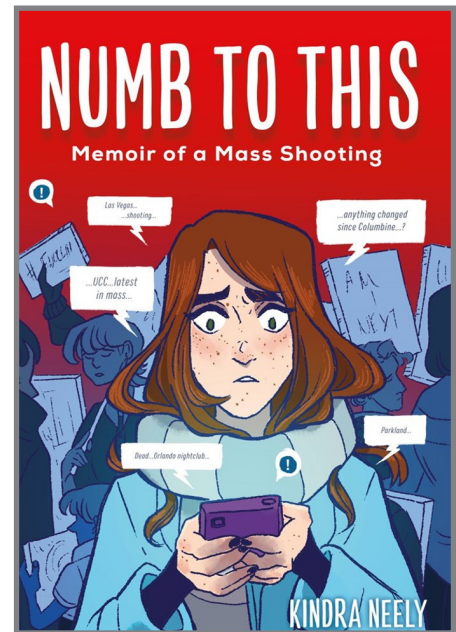
Numb to This: Memoir of a Mass Shooting

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence, Suicide References)



SYNOPSIS

Kindra Neely never expected it to happen to her. No-one does. Sure, she'd sometimes been close to gun violence, like when the house down the street from her childhood home in Texas was targeted in a drive-by shooting. But now she lived in Oregon, where she spent her time swimming in rivers with friends or attending classes at the bucolic Umpqua Community College.

And then, one day, it happened: a mass shooting shattered her college campus. Over the span of a few minutes, on October 1, 2015, eight students and a professor lost their lives. And suddenly, Kindra became a survivor. This empathetic and ultimately hopeful graphic memoir recounts Kindra's journey forward from those few minutes that changed everything.

It wasn't easy. Every time Kindra took a step towards peace and wholeness, a new mass shooting devastated her again. Las Vegas. Parkland. She was hopeless at times, feeling as if no-one was listening. Not even at the worldwide demonstration March for Our Lives. But finally, Kindra learned that—for her—the path towards hope wound through art, helping others and sharing her story.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Kindra Neely is an artist and writer based in southern Oregon. Her art journey began with the amazing community and encouragement she received at Umpqua Community College. She took her first drawing class Drawing Nature at UCC and still likes to hike the trails regularly to sketch flowers and ferns. *Numb to This* is her debut graphic novel.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think is happening on the cover?
 - What do you think the title of this novel might mean?
 - Read the quotes in the cover artwork. What do you think they refer to, and why do you think this?
 - How do you think the character on the cover is feeling?
 - When and where do you think this book is set? Why do you think this?
 - What do you think might happen in this novel?
- In Texas, where Kindra spent her first thirteen years, there were a lot of guns, and they were seen as being pretty

normal. As a class, discuss how this differs from where you are growing up?

- Re-read the description of the school and daily life in the first chapter, and compare the events described to daily life at your school. Some things to consider in your discussion might be the role of an overt police presence within schools, and its impact on students' attitudes and behaviours.
- As a class, discuss the differences between Kindra's life in Texas, and her time at high school in Oregon. In one sentence, describe the benefits of moving to Oregon for Kindra.
- During the shooting at UCC, Kindra and her friends were separated, and didn't know what was going on, who had been hurt, or what was going to happen to them next. As a class, brainstorm and think of words that could be used to describe how Kindra and her friends and classmates must have been feeling.
- On p 58, Kindra shares that seeing a national newspaper post a photo of her and Josh hugging left her feeling violated. In small groups discuss how having photos of you posted publicly without your consent or knowledge can be upsetting, and how having photos of you posted when in a traumatic situation like Kindra's must be so much worse.
- Why were the media so intrusive, when Kindra and her classmates and their families were clearly suffering from shock and grief?
- In small groups discuss the role that the media plays in the ongoing epidemic of mass shootings in the US. As a class discuss the conclusions that your groups came to, and brainstorm ways that the media, and the general population, can help survivors of these tragedies work together to try to reduce their prevalence.
- When Kindra nearly committed suicide, she says that it was a moment of apathy. Why is this such a dangerous way for someone who is suicidal to feel? What can we say or do to help people who are struggling with suicidal ideation?
 - In small groups, discuss the different ways that we can support each other on a daily basis, so that people who feel lost and alone can feel more connected and hopeful. Include in your discussion the fact that no-one else knew how Kindra was feeling, and remember that we can never tell what others are feeling.
- Kindra found that creating the dragonfly memorial artwork, in honour of the victims of the shooting, helped her personally cope in the aftermath. Likewise, creating this book was a direct response to her feeling helpless and overwhelmed by the rash of mass shootings and tragedy that seemed to surround her constantly. As she says on p 254, she was inspired to write 'a book to show people like me that they aren't alone. Or that their feelings are normal.' And sharing her book in class felt good to be open about what was going on. In small groups, discuss the importance of sharing your feelings in the aftermath of a tragedy, and how creative endeavours can help.
- Kindra took comfort in creating art to share her feelings. Create an artwork or other creative project of your own in direct response to reading Kindra's story. Your response can be a painting, sculpture, story, song, poem or any other creative project of your choice. Present your completed project to the class, sharing which aspects of Kindra's story you have chosen to highlight, and the different ways you have chosen to represent various aspects of the story, and how they interrelate.
- The novel makes very clear that in Kindra's life, her family and friends have played, and continue to play, a very important role. Create a four panel comic strip of your own, that shares your feelings about the importance of having caring and supportive family and/or friends in people's lives.
- On p 63 Kindra says 'You can't really be hopeful or resilient if you haven't processed that what you've been through threatens those feelings.' Do you think that this is true? Why/why not? As a class, discuss your response to this statement, and whether you think it is universally true, and if so why. What are some things that you can do or say to help those who have suffered a tragedy or traumatic life-event?
- On pp 270–273 Kindra talks about the importance of feeling heard. She shares with a new friend that people may feel uncomfortable and awkward, and not know what to say; but when everyone stays quiet because they don't know how to respond, the person who is sharing feels unheard and like no-one is listening. As a class, discuss the difficulty in knowing what to say to someone who is grieving or traumatised, or who is sharing a deeply personal story with you.
 - In small groups, brainstorm and create a list of at least three kind, inoffensive and empathetic statements that you can use when you feel like you don't know how to respond, that will nonetheless let someone know that you've heard them and care. As a class, combine your individual lists into a class list, and print it on an A3 piece of

card to be hung in the classroom for daily reference.

- How did reading this book make you feel? What were the most emotionally impactful scenes for you? Create a four-panel strip that shares your changing emotional state as you read and processed the story.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE